

A state of constant prodding: Live music, precocity and regulation.

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Abstract

Live music makes a vital contribution to the cultural and creative identities of cities. In turn, the spaces in which such activity takes place contribute strongly to the functioning of local music and arts scenes. However, particularly in large Australian cities, there is a tension between economic development, fuelled by an extended property bubble, and the viability of small-to- medium live music venues. This tension is compounded by community attitudes toward arts and culture as well as a range of regulatory measures which govern the spaces in which this activity takes place.

This paper examines the challenges inherent with developing and sustaining of live music venues in relation to the regulatory barriers associated with doing so. This paper draws on data from two qualitative studies examining producer accounts of live music operation in Perth, the capital of Western Australia, and Sydney, the capital of New South Wales. Each of these studies focused on the regulatory frameworks, and barriers associated with being able to support local, original contemporary music activity and were prompted following the closure of several highly supportive, high profile live music venues in each location. This research came in the wake of the so-called 'lock out laws', which placed limits on the operating hours of licensed premises in the entertainment district of Kings Cross and surrounding suburbs. There was significant local and national debate around the impact and effectiveness of these laws and Perth venue operators were mindful that such laws could be put in place on their spaces.

This paper is contextualised within debates relating to the importance of supportive live music venues, the challenges associated with developing, supporting and maintaining such spaces in light of gentrification and urban renewal strategies. As this paper argues, these strategies, which work to enhance the vibrancy of cities – and often position arts and culture activity as being a vital component - often displace and/ or cause tensions for the spaces in which cultural and creative activity takes place during and after such regeneration.

Keywords: live music; regulation; urban development; gentrification

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Introduction

Live music makes a vital contribution to the cultural and creative identities of cities, and can serve as a driver for economic development (cf Seman 2010, 2015, Carter and Muller 2015). In turn, the spaces in which such activity takes place contribute strongly to the functioning of local music scenes. Particularly in large Australian cities, there is a tension between economic development, fueled by an extended property bubble, and the viability of small-to-medium live music venues. This tension is compounded by community attitudes toward particular arts and culture activities such as live music, as well as a range of regulatory measures which govern the spaces in which this activity takes place, but do not always adequately work to support such activity.

This paper examines the challenges associated with operating live music venues in two Australian cities - Perth, the capital of Western Australia, and Sydney, the capital city of New South Wales. Both cities have experienced similar challenges in the last two decades relating to resource and property booms and attendant population growth. As part of this economic and population growth each city's live music scenes have been negatively impacted by gentrification and urban renewal. This has affected the urban landscape of these cities, and in turn, the ways in which they do and do not support and facilitate live music activity in small-to-medium sized venues. The ways regulation is enacted, and policed in live music venues also makes it difficult for them to operate. Crucially, much of this regulation and the broader policy context that informs it, is not targeted at live music activity. This often results in live music scenes being regulated in a de-facto fashion by liquor, housing, planning and other policy areas not traditionally conceived of as the domain of cultural policy.

This paper draws on data from two qualitative studies examining accounts from venue-specific live music promoters and venue managers in Perth, the capital of Western Australia, and Sydney, the capital of New South Wales. Both studies focused on the regulatory frameworks, and barriers associated with being able to support local, original contemporary music activity. Each were prompted following the closure of several high profile live music venues, with the Sydney study also examining the so-called 'lock out laws', which had come into place in the city's Kings Cross entertainment district and surrounding suburbs in 2014. These lockout laws limited the hours of trading for licensed premises; requiring them to stop new patrons from entering their venues after 1:30am, imposing a 3am closing time and limiting the sale of certain types of alcohol after midnight. There was significant local and national debate around the impact and effectiveness of these laws, which were also in place in the capital cities of Brisbane (Queensland) and Melbourne (Victoria) at various points over the past three years. Perth venue operators were mindful that such laws could be put in place on their spaces. This paper is contextualised within debates regarding the importance of supporting live music venues, as well as the hurdles associated with developing and maintaining such spaces in light of changing urban landscapes.

Research context and methods

Live music venues play a vital role in the functioning of localised place-specific music scenes. They facilitate opportunities for musicians to connect with one another, with industry, and vitally with audiences. Throughout this process, these spaces provide musicians with the opportunity to develop their creative and performance skills (Ballico, 2015; Ballico, 2013; Ballico, 2009; Ballico and Bennett, 2010; Johansson and Bell, 2009; Johnson and Homan, 2003). These spaces, in turn, make strong contributions to the creative and cultural identities of the communities and cities in which they operate (Ballico, 2016;

Lobato, 2006). As Johansson and Bell (2009) put forth, and as we examine in detail here, a multitude of factors come into play when examining the structure and functioning of place-specific music scenes, which are largely centered on matters relating to the culture, economy and geography of the city in which they function (pp. 221 - 225). In large Australian cities, there is a specific tension between economic development that has been fueled by both an extended property bubble, and a natural resources boom and the viability of small-to-medium live music venues (defined by Bennett, 2010 as being of 200, and 300 - 600 in capacity). This is further exacerbated by the ways in which the live music sector is regulated - both with regards to the regulations, and in relation to the ways in which these are applied in-situ. As revealed across the two studies reported on here, and reflected in existing literature, venues that support original live music activity are often conflated with other spaces which do not provide such entertainment options (Chatterton, 2002; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002; Demant and Landlot, 2014; Lovatt and O'Connor, 1995; Talbot, 2011). This represents a significant challenge for venues in being able to operate, and in turn, provide opportunities for musicians, and to be able to provide a range of entertainment options for their patrons.

These complexities are exemplified in the experiences of live music promoters and venue managers in the two cities we discuss here. Perth and Sydney are the fifth and most populated cities in the country respectively, and play different, but significant, roles in the Australian musical landscape. Sydney, located on the east coast of the country, is one of two cities - along with Melbourne, the capital of Victoria - that are home to much of the national music and media sector. This includes, historically, national and international record labels; radio and TV operations; management; promotions; and, live music touring. Perth, located to the south west of Western Australia, is a city historically uncomfortable with its cultural and creative identity, and therefore has previously looked to the larger cities of Sydney and Melbourne for validation of its creative outputs. Because of this, its contemporary music sector has been perceived as being not only physically, but also functionally, isolated from the operation of Australia's commercial music industries. In the last two decades, however, Perth's music sector has contributed strongly to the national music landscape, and undergone significant growth with regards to the legitimisation of its musical outputs and associated local music sector (Ballico, 2013). At the same time the music industry of Perth largely, but not exclusively, operates in a satellite capacity of the national sector: major record labels have distribution and publicity representatives in the city, national music press outlets distribute locally-focused street presses (online and/ or physical), while several Perth live music promoters operate in conjunction, and on behalf of, east coast based live music promoters. Due to this core-peripheral relationship, pursuing a music career in Perth is often viewed as distinctly different the experience of artists on the east coast of the country - where established touring circuits operate between capital cities, and where record label executives and national media can be more easily engaged (Ballico, 2013). However, closer inspection of the factors that influence local original contemporary live music activity in both cities reveals similar tensions at play. Perth and Sydney have both experienced 'booms' in the past decade: for Perth this was relation to the state's natural resources sector (which would peak in 2013 and effectively bust by 2015), and for Sydney in relation to its property sector. As a result of these shifts, both cities sought to rebrand their creative and cultural identities, with music, and the associated cultural activities forming a vital part of this process.

The complex operation of the live music sector and equally complex policy and regulatory environment in which it exists informed both studies reported on here. Each study draws on in-depth qualitative data

obtained through semi-structured interviews, and were premised by events that had considerable impact on the way in which each city's live music sector functioned - most notably sudden (and unexpected) venue closures and the introduction of new regulations by way of lock out laws in Sydney in 2014, which affected trading hours and the sale of certain types of alcohol in and around the CBD.

The Perth study was commissioned and undertaken in conjunction with West Australian Music (WAM), a not-for-profit organisation that undertakes a range of activities that support and advocate for local original music activity across WA as well as in national and international markets. Fieldwork was undertaken in late 2015 following the sudden closure of two music venues which were particularly supportive of local original contemporary music activity earlier that year. The study's aim was to examine the ways in which liquor regulation was and was not able to support such fluctuations in the sector. It comprised six interviews with venue owners, managers and/ or promoters of ten individually branded live music spaces. These venues operated in and around the central business district (CBD) of Perth, in the city of Fremantle (25 kilometres south) as well as in the south west of the state. Nine of these spaces were established, having been operational from a few years to several decades, and another was undergoing the process of obtaining a liquor licence in order to set up operations in a newly developed space. The venues varied in size and scale and overarching function beyond that of supporting live music, as well as how established they were within the local music scene. A common thread was that supporting local original contemporary music was vital to the venues' operation, making a significant contribution to the culture of the venues, and that difficulties were (or expected to be) experienced, due to the ways in which liquor regulations were enacted in situ, and a perceived lack of understanding of the nuances of original music activity on part of the regulators.

The study of Sydney's small-to-medium live music venues was commissioned by the City of Sydney and examined the cultural and economic value of these spaces through cost-benefit analysis and qualitative accounts by music producers and consumers. This research coincided with significant public attention to the impact of the so-called lockdown laws, introduced in 2014 with an aim to curtail anti-social behaviour and alcohol-related violence around the Kings Cross Entertainment precinct.. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with 673 live music patrons and 10 live music producers, including venue managers; independent promoters and festival organisers.

Live music and liquor regulation in Western Australia and New South Wales

Despite a historical view that government intervention impedes the "free-flow of creative talent" (Breen, 1993, p. 63), the Australian music industry has been supported through a range of government initiatives and interventions dating as far back as 1927. This has included the introduction of radio airplay quotas; funding programs to facilitate a range of recording, touring and distribution activities; and the introduction of copyright legislation (Homan, 2002). While much of this has occurred at a Federal Government level, much of that which impacts upon the ways live music activity occurs in local music scenes is handled at a State Government level, and is primarily underwritten by the ways in which the public's access to alcohol is controlled, notably to people over the age of 18. The underwriting of the live music sector by the regulation of alcohol is due to the live music sector's intersection with the broader entertainment and hospitality sectors.

The Liquor Control Act (1988) governs the ways in which, and circumstances under, which alcohol can be supplied to the public in WA, by way of a range of primary and secondary objectives that are enacted under a range of liquor licences that govern the spaces in which such activity occurs. Specific to the spaces which supply alcohol in a social setting – such as pubs and clubs – the licences place a particular focus on the operating hours (both days and times), as well as nature of the consumption itself – for example, that it must occur alongside the provision of food services, or with the presence of live entertainment. Positive amendments have been made to the Act in the last decade or so, in a bid to support a diversity of entertainment options - and specifically local live original music activity - and to further protect the public from the ill-effects of alcohol consumption and associated activities such as smoking (cf Ballico, 2016) - however, as this research found, challenges remain due to the ways in which the Act is administered by the government and statutory authorities and the ways in which it is applied in-situ.

In Sydney, the Liquor Act (1982) and Registered Clubs Act (1976) have effectively worked as barriers to the provision of live music through relatively costly liquor licenses designed to limit the number of licensed venues; privileging the form of licensed venues over their function and requiring venues to obtain an additional place of public entertainment (POPE) license in order to host live music (Homan, 2008). Further, the Liquor Act (1982) placed the onus on venues to not “interrupt the good behaviour and order of the neighbourhood”(s104), leaving live music venues open to the risk of closure due to noise complaints – particularly from new residential developments. In 2007 changes were made to the Liquor Act to address some of these problems, including the removal of the POPE license, the addition of order of occupancy considerations in noise disputes and the addition of a new *On Premises Entertainment* license, dramatically reducing the license costs for small bars that host live music and other entertainment (Burke and Schmidt, 2009).

Live music in Sydney and Perth

From the mid-1960s through to the 80s liberalised licensing laws saw Sydney develop a thriving live music scene centred around pubs and informal venues such as surf-life saving clubs and community halls. This scene fostered big-name Australian bands such as INXS, Midnight Oil and Cold Chisel. It was also plagued by alcohol fueled violence, particularly in the larger ‘beer barns’, 2000+ capacity venues that sprawled across the suburbs, beaches and inner city (Walker, 2012). Central to Sydney’s nightlife was the King’s Cross Entertainment precinct, a menagerie of clubs, pubs, restaurants, brothels and cheap housing encircling the intersection of Darlinghurst Road, William and Victoria Streets - approximately 2 kilometres east of Sydney’s CBD (Nowra, 2013).

During this same period Perth’s live music scene morphed from suburban “beer barns” playing host cover bands in the 1970s and 1980s, to being concentrated in and around the CBD and inner suburbs, as well as in Fremantle, some 25 kilometres south of Perth (Ballico, 2013). It is this inner city and Fremantle-based scene which gave rise to a range of well-known Perth bands such as End of Fashion, Eskimo Joe, Jebediah, and the Sleepy Jackson, who would attract national followings in the mid-late 1990s. It is a scene that has experienced challenges due to venue closures and the cessation of live music events associated with real and perceived issues relating to noise complaints, as well as changes to venue management and/ or ownership (cf. on The Grosvenor: Bennett, 2005; Three Bears: Inglis, 2007; the Hyde Park Hotel: Giles, 2007).

Between the late 80s and early 90s Sydney's live music scene contracted due to venue closures related to concerns over public order, inner-city gentrification and attendant noise complaints, the introduction of restrictive licenses for live music and the introduction of poker machines into venues (Homan, 2011). Currently, there is a low concentration of primary purpose live music venues in and around Sydney's CBD. A "critically under-provided" transport infrastructure (McGuirk and O'Neil, 2002) makes migration between these venues difficult. According to interviewees this encourages audiences, and promoters, to view live music consumption in the CBD as discrete events. Venue operators and bookers suggested this required them to function as entertainment 'destinations', meaning they were less willing to book untested acts, free events or casual live music.

The capacity of venues in Sydney also appears stratified in a way that is not reflected elsewhere in Australia. Promoters and managers interviewed in Sydney identified a lack of small and intermediate (200-300 capacity venues). They also suggested there was an absence of incubator venues programming incidental live music that have traditionally served as early developmental steps in the careers of emerging performers and promoters. In practice this means that, as bands develop, they may be limited to playing smaller venues than they might be able to fill, or risk by playing venues that are larger than they have an audience for.

Similar challenges exist in Perth whereby pockets of original contemporary live music activity are centred on the inner city and surrounding suburbs, as well as in Fremantle, some 25 kilometres south of the Perth CBD. The distance between these two hubs of activity means the ability for patrons to 'venue hop' is virtually non-existent, with patronage of particular spaces based, further influenced by the caliber of entertainment provided, and on the reputation of the venue in question. This is further buoyed by the prominent role original live music plays in the entertainment mix of the venues included here. Aside from the space that was developing an application for new space, all were established within the local music scene to varying levels of prominence. From the perspective of both the audiences and the broader local music industry, some of these venues are known more for their support of *local* music than hosting touring acts, or their operations relating to the provision of alcohol and food. Such venues are highly valued by audiences as places to engage with the scene, and by musicians as prized performance opportunities. However, due to the relatively niche nature of original live music scenes, opportunities for local music activity in the suburbs are limited. This is further impacted by Perth being a city in which many people rely on their cars for transport, influenced by the lack of a well-developed public transport network that can connect suburban residents with inner city precincts late at night. Therefore, suburban networks of live music venues, which boomed in the 1980s, no longer operate. Positive changes related to a reduction in alcohol consumption patterns, coupled with introduction of random breath testing of drivers, the notion of 'selling out' and moving to the suburbs (and therefore away from entertainment precincts) have also been credited with the decline of these suburban networks in the past three decades.

Houses and holes

From the late 90s, following an economic downturn famously branded by then treasurer Paul Keating as 'the recession we had to have', Australia has experienced a sustained boom in residential housing described by many economists as a bubble (cf Chau, 2018; Shi et al, 2017; Thornhill, 2017; Huang, 2017; Berry and Dalton, 2014; Keen, 2009). The drivers behind this boom are contested however it has had the

effect of significantly raising the cost of inner city property, leading to new residential developments and attendant gentrification in inner city areas in most capital cities. In Sydney the median house price has risen from \$64,800 in 1980 to almost \$1million in 2016 and in Perth from \$48,500 to \$520,000 during the same period (Thomas and Hall, 2016). Similarly, the most recent housing affordability survey by Demographia (2018) ranks Sydney as the second most unaffordable housing market in the world after Hong Kong. Across Australia the gentrification and urban renewal of inner-city suburbs has typically affected live music venues negatively, through increases in commercial rent as well as conflict with new residents over complaints about noise, public drunkenness and anti-social activity and violence (Shaw, 2013; Lobato, 2006; Ballico, 2009; Bennett, 2005; Gibson and Homan, 2004).

In Western Australia, a state with a well-established resources sector (Tonts et al, 2012) , a boom which began to take hold in the mid-2000s, resulted in an increase in incomes and ensuing living costs. Of particular note was the increase in housing costs which are commonly attributed to both a change in the city's housing needs associated with changing demographics; increased demand and competition for housing associated with the mining boom; and easy access to housing finance enabling owners to pay above the market and/ or asking price in order to secure a residence (cf Kearns and Lows, 2011; Brueckner et al, 2013; Pash, 2014). In a bid to capitalise on an increase in disposable incomes, and shed the city of its alleged 'dullsville' tag (cf. Stratton and Trainer, 2016) the city centre underwent a range of place activation and regeneration strategies in order to lift the creative and cultural identity of the city (Ballico, 2016). Alongside this has been the desire to provide more inner city living options, which will see an increase in high density living options sitting alongside and within entertainment districts.

In Sydney, the boom in property prices has accompanied a gradual decline in the number of primary purpose music venues operating in the CBD and surrounding areas (Walker, 2012). Although gentrification and rising property prices has undoubtedly brought new residents into conflict with existing venues there are a number of other conflating factors. Firstly in the early 1990s the NSW Labour government introduced legislation allowing poker machines into pubs and clubs, causing many venues to be remodeled around gaming rooms rather than live music performance (Lee, 2016). Similarly, until 2007 Sydney live music venues had no recourse to prior occupancy to protect themselves from noise complaints and were often trading under the POPE (Place of Public Entertainment) licences, which imposed significant structural issues on the provision of live music (Homan, 2010). Finally, in 2014 the NSW State Government, responding to two deaths due to 'one-punch' assaults and attendant media pressure, implemented a suite of lockout laws designed to curb alcohol related violence in the Sydney CBD. Homan (2017) argues that the implementation of the lockout laws followed a moral panic around a statistically small, but widely publicised and politicised, assaults associated with a number of known high-risk venues. Recently published research notes that, as identified by interviewees, much of the activity previously occurring in Kings Cross has been displaced to other areas such as Newtown, which have experienced increased patron numbers and decreased public amenity and safety (Hughes and Weedon-Newstead, 2017).

The most significant impact noted by interviewees was that areas of the Sydney CBD directly affected by the 2014 legislation experienced less foot traffic and, by extension, audiences who might 'drop in' to a venue rather than plan to attend a specific event. Because of this, venues operating within the and around Kings Cross prior to the lockout laws were more concerned with differentiating themselves from their

competition and so were more open to programming untested acts. Venues operating within the entertainment precinct also noted an increased presence of police and other enforcement agents during the lockdown laws implementation, which they believed further affected attendance. Interviewees also noted that limits on the provision of alcohol have a potentially greater impact on live music venues as audiences were less likely to purchase food and beverages during performances. This observation is supported by research commissioned by the City of Sydney (2015), which identified that “the rate of alcohol consumption [in live music venues] is lowest while the band / artist is playing” (p. 20).

These factors were linked by interviewees to declining revenue and the closure of some live music venues. It is unclear, and unlikely, that the lockdown laws were the cause of these closures so much as contributing additional stresses to already precarious businesses. In Sydney, the many interviewees described their position as precarious or characterised by a high degree of uncertainty. Many industry workers reported needing several part-time jobs or consecutive short-term contracts to maintain a living wage, a problem further compounded by high rents and property prices. High levels of stress and burnout appear to be a feature of the live music, and entertainment, industries nationwide (Van den Eynde et al, 2016).

The introduction of the lockdown laws in Sydney was seen by many in the music industry as a knee-jerk response that was both heavy-handed and non-consultative. Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore, who had previously argued for addressing the problem of large, late trading premises in Kings Cross (2012), described the legislation as “a sledgehammer when what we needed was a well-researched, evidence-based, flexible response using transport, planning, licensing and police” (Moore, 2016). Aside from their direct impact on Sydney’s live music, the implementation of the lockdown laws are instructive insofar as they have become intertwined with the promulgation and criticism of gentrification and urban renewal in Sydney.

Significantly, property prices in and around Kings Cross were reported as rising by up to 25% in the first year following the introduction of the lockdown laws; attributed to “sharply declining activity in the entertainment precinct” (Irvine, 2016). Reporting by property listings website Domain.com (2015) framed this in terms of a demographic shift towards baby boomers and young families who previously “would have been perturbed by the night scene”. Tabloid The Daily Telegraph similarly reported a \$500 million dollar development deal that would “completely gentrify the last remnants of the once--notorious party district” (Harris, 2016). The voracity of this reporting is questionable, however a \$47 million development application lodged with the City of Sydney in late 2017 proposes tearing down a prominent Kings Cross building which previously housed bars and adult clubs torn and replacing it with new car parking, retail and residential spaces (City of Sydney, 2017). These developments effectively mean that establishing new live music venues within Kings Cross will be difficult for smaller operators and raises broader issue around gentrification as displacing existing activity and excluding new creative ventures.

The Keep Sydney Open protests, for example, responded to the lockdown laws by situating them in context of sustained venue closures and a contracting live music sector in the Sydney CBD. Interestingly, much of the discourse surrounding Keep Sydney Open, and critique of the lockdown laws more generally (cf. Barrie, 2016), tended to conflate the amendments to the liquor act with attacks on personal liberty,

government funding cuts, housing affordability and the continued closure of live music venues. Speaking at the Keep Sydney Open rally Isabella Manfredi of Sydney band The Preatures argued that:

While our generation struggles with rising rent and the reality of never owning our own home, increased regulations, the war on noise, our Universities corporatised, our social services cut, we are at once dismissed as lazy, selfish, and entitled. Now our venues and livelihoods are being taken. (TheMusic, 2016)

Manfredi's couching of the lockout laws in terms of inter-generational conflict reflects the reality that gentrification and urban renewal have tended toward an homogenising influence on the demographic makeup of inner-city Sydney suburbs (Cameron and Craig, 2008). Atkinson and Easthope's (2009) analysis of creative cities strategies, influenced by the ideas of Richard Florida and Charles Landry, note that artists, including musicians, are often the "displaced by the subsequent raising of rents through commercial and residential gentrification" (p. 71 - see also Atkinson et al 2011). Similarly Gibson (2006) argued that grassroots creative producers in inner-city Sydney suburbs are particularly vulnerable to displacement due to property market fluctuations, threatening the viability of certain types of creative practice (pp. 192-194). This type of displacement can dramatically impact the ongoing viability of live music scenes. As noted by Behr et al (2016) in the UK, small-to-medium music venues most vulnerable to and typically displacement are vital to the health of live music scenes and difficult to replace. The live sector is a vital way through which the pulse of a local music scene can be gauged, while also being a key way through which musicians are able to network with one another, industry members, and with audiences (Ballico, 2015).

Many of the Sydney interviewees noted that establishing new venues in their current locations would be very difficult or impossible due to these changes in demographics, higher density living, increased property prices and difficulties navigating regulatory frameworks. From the perspective of industry workers regulatory and enforcement bodies were often described as monolithic, unsympathetic to live music activity and inhibiting their agency to carry out their business. Policing and enforcement in particular was perceived as reactive and in some cases unnecessarily aggressive, with the potential to impact negatively on patronage. Security and policing costs were also described as disproportionate to risk for one-off live music events and festivals, and that this was an inhibitor of new ventures.

Perth venue operators were especially concerned by this, particularly in relation to the introduction of the Small Bar licence in 2007. This licence, while facilitating a diversification of the sector, has, the interviewees perceive, resulted in an increase in the policing of aspects of the LCA and an increase in scrutiny of applications. This, they posit, is due to the high turnover of operators working within the Small Bar sector. As one interviewee put forth:

There's definitely more of a scrutinising effect. [I'm] not necessarily certain that's a bad thing though. I think what's happened is a lot of Small Bar [licences] have been let in and a lot of them are coming with their own issues – either financial or logistical [...] I think that, in turn, is putting a lot more pressure on the Director to make certain everything is rubber stamped properly. As I said, I'm not necessarily sure that's a bad thing, you know, we're professional operators so we go

through it in a proper way and do our due diligence and everything. However it can be frustrating, the amount of red tape.

Aside from the impact of increased scrutiny and enforcement, Sydney venue operators experienced a perceived lack of agency in relation to changes in regulation and enforcement. Several venues and promoters identified specific grievances where they felt the profitability of their business had been negatively impacted by regulation and enforcement issues outside their control. In his review of the lockout laws, Callinan (2016) notes this rhetoric is common amongst submissions from the live music industries but argues, citing the taxi and retail industries, that “many other businesses have had to adapt to changing conditions, including of law, in the last decade or so” (p. 87). In both of these industries the changes Callinan refers to (the emergence of ‘big box’ retailers and online shopping and the entry of ride sharing platforms such as Uber) have resulted in a reconfiguration of operation, regulation and control of market share. This has proved true for live music operators in Sydney in Perth.

In Sydney a number of small-to-medium sized venues have been acquired in recent years by larger conglomerates such as the Australian Leisure and Hospitality group who operate 49 venues in Sydney and 330 nationally. Interviewees who had worked with these venues noted the scale and buying power of these types of businesses make them more capable of investing in the infrastructure required for new live music rooms as a way to differentiate their venues in a crowded marketplace. However they are also unlikely to invest in primary purpose live music venues or maintain live music if, as reported by almost all interviewees, it turns out to be less profitable than food, alcohol and poker machines. In Perth, where poker machines are not legalised for use outside the state’s casino, the takeover of venues by larger conglomerates has led to shifts in the makeup of the live music scene due to changes in the entertainment mix of the venues, as well as turnovers of staff and the like which contribute strongly the culture of these spaces. Similar challenges have been experienced in WA, with the buyout of venues such as the Hyde Park Hotel by Australian Liquor and Hospitality (a subsidiary of the national grocery chain Woolworths), and a shift toward large liquor outlets being attached to such venues (cf Giles, 2007). This tension is compounded by community attitudes toward particular arts and culture activities such as live music, as well as a range of regulatory measures which govern the spaces in which this activity takes place, but do not always adequately work to support such activity.

Discussion

These two studies have revealed tensions between venue operations and the ways in which regulations that govern these spaces, as well as concerns relating to the ongoing urban development of the two cities in question. Significantly, strategies, which work to enhance the vibrancy of cities, and often position arts and culture activity as being a vital component - often displace and/ or cause tensions for the spaces in which cultural and creative activity takes place during and after such regeneration. Perth’s CBD, for example, continues to undergo a range of changes relating to the re-emergence of inner city apartment living, while also coming to terms with the bust associated with the mining boom. The precarious nature of many live music ventures and employees makes them extremely vulnerable to displacement due to gentrification and urban renewal. As such, the mechanisms through which gentrification is enacted has historically had an outsize impact on live music venues in Sydney and Perth.

Rather than eliminating all live music activity, the main impact of gentrification appears to be a reconfiguration of operation and ownership or control of venues. The homogenising aspect of gentrification appears to extend beyond demographics to the ownership and operation of live music venues by conglomerates who can afford increased commercial rents and property prices. Many of the small-to-medium venues displaced by gentrification are vital to the health of live music scenes and are difficult to replace once closed. As noted above, existing venue owners have commented that they would be unlikely to be able to open their venues in their current locations if they were attempting to establish them today. This is further impacted by the cyclical nature of music consumption trends which influence the popularity of particular genres of music and the venues in which this activity occurs. Additional challenges have been revealed in relation to the ways in which regulations pertaining to the establishment of venues – such as the ways in which to go about obtaining a liquor licence – further impact upon speed with which new spaces can be established.

Returning to Callinan's comparison between the external impact of the lockout laws on the live music industries in Sydney and the impact of online retailers such as Amazon and ride sharing apps such as Uber on the retail and taxi industries, it's worth noting that the disruption of both of these industries was accompanied by aggressive monopolisation strategies, exploitative labour practices and highly suspect corporate ethics (cf. Kerp, 2018; Gouldon, 2017; Isaac 2017; Dwoskin and Frankel, 2017; Opray. 2017). What then might we expect of the continued impact of gentrification and urban renewal on music venues on people working in the live music industries in Sydney, Perth and the rest of Australia? As importantly, what happens if the booms in property and mining, already experiencing a slowdown, are reversed? How much irreversible change might be wrought and at what cost?

Most research into live music activity in Australia is reactive, responding respectively to changes in regulations and gentrification as their impacts become clear. Given the magnitude of change identified in Sydney and Perth we suggest that what is needed is research that can direct policy, rather than simply critique it, in a co-ordinated manner across the various areas impacting live music. In particular there appears to be a need for research that explores the question of what the Australian live music industries look like in a post-boom economic downturn and what might be done now to safeguard them for the future.

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